Advocacy "Do's and Don'ts"

When meeting with a legislator or other elected official, it is important to follow some basic guidelines for how to conduct the meeting and yourself. The following "Do's and Don'ts" will help you plan your meeting and ensure that it is successful.

First, the do's:

- Identify yourself and who you represent every time you make contact. Legislators and local policymakers meet hundreds of people and they can't remember everyone.
- Know the issue or the status of the legislation.
- Refer to the legislation by bill number.
- Be brief (10 minutes or less). Legislators are very busy.
- Thank legislators and staff before and after the meeting.
- Keep the door open for further discussion even if you don't agree at the time. There's a reason they say "politics makes strange bedfellows."
- Talk with legislators even if their positions differ with yours.
- Think of yourself as a consultant to a legislator. You have expertise and insights that help the legislators understand the bill.
- Be honest. *Never* lie to the legislator or staff member.
- Acknowledge opposing arguments and any political liabilities.
- Ask the legislator for support.
- Leave behind a one-page fact sheet summarizing your position. Highlight important facts and arguments. Include your name, address, and telephone number so you can be reached if there are any questions.

And the don'ts:

- Arrive with a crowd. One to three well-prepared supporters are enough.
- Get upset if you only meet with a staff member.
- Back legislators into a corner.
- Overwhelm them with too much information or jargon.
- Get into lengthy disagreements.
- Be afraid to say you don't know.
- Offer to find out and send the information soon.
- Confront, threaten, pressure, or beg.
- Expect legislators to be specialists. Their schedules and the number of bills make them generalists.
- Ask the impossible...at least not too often!